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THE

CANDIDATING FAIR:

A

STUDENT'S DREAM

OF

TRIAL PREACHING.

A STAIR

"Perhaps it may turn out a sang;
Perhaps turn out a sermon."—BURNS.

e Ut Gin

PUBLISHED AT ANDOVER, MASS.



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THE

CANDIDATING FAIR.

PART I.

Whether 't was real, or only seemed;
Whether 't was real, or only seemed;
Whether the place was earth or — well,
I promised myself I never would tell.

There was a city of churches, all—
Nothing but churches, large and small,
Streets of churches in line and square,
Churches on avenues broad and fair,
Lanes of churches, and alleys too—
On every spot of the city through
Was either a church or chapel floor;
No worshipping host could ask for more.

There was the front of awful mien, That rose like the brow of Sinai, seen Under the turret flames of wrath,
That terror flashed on the desert path,
And shook the earth, and shook the sky,
While trembling hosts did prostrate lie.
So chilled my soul in awful dread,
As the grand cathedral raised its head,
And flashed to heaven from gilded spire
A glory so sublime and dire,
That every lesser dome from thence
Did vie in stooping reverence.

Not all, indeed, for quite in view
Of this magnificence, there grew
Unto my vision shapes all ripe
With full pretence of every type
Once sacred, — from Egyptian old,
Byzantine, Saracenic bold,
To Grecian arch and architrave,
Basilie dome and Gothic nave.
And these would naught of deference.
But vowed the strutting consequence
Of full success, and levied claim
On lesser shrines to grant the same
High worthiness.

And thence, removed One circle outward, as behooved, The church in which old Noah sat, Imported straight from Ararat, Arose and spread, and covered quite The space of a small village site.

Three hundred cubits, I could say, Would scarce exceed the longer way. Full fifty was the breadth thereof, And thirty was the height thereof. A door was in the side withal, And from the roof a chimney tall Stood up against the wond'ring sky, As proud as any steeple high, And served a double use.

At best,

These were a score or two. The rest
Were all as modest, some more fair,
With a social tone and a freer air,
With something still of a worthy grace,
With turret or dome to mark the place
And share with the sisterhood of Art,
In holiest use, some pleasing part.

'T were long to speak of chapels small,
Of lecture-room and bethel hall,
Of temples pretty and temples plain,
That walled the street and walled the lane,
And built the corners everywhere
That turned a court or alley there.

So much my eye had quickly caught; But, ere it could be shaped in thought, My wonder rose to such a height To learn 'the wherefore of the sight, Or what unwonted cause compels The wrangling of so many bells, That Pilgrim in the holy race Did ne'er ascend at such a pace As I descended.

And, good chance,
As either side I spared a glance,
Two ways had met, and at my side
A fellow traveller I espied.

"Pray tell me, sir," thus I to him,
"Is this the New Jerusalem
Of latter saints, built up so quick

By prophets in arithmetic—

A place of holy watch and prayer
Until the coming? Pray declare."

And he to me, with curious look,
That showed my query half mistook:
"Indeed, good sir, 't were on my lip
To give your joke a playful nip;
But, serious, if such you are,
I'm sure you must have journey'd far;
"T were else amazing ignorance
To be confessed, if you perchance
Have nothing heard of the Churches' Fair."
"And what, pray tell, is the Churches' Fair?"

"Indeed, the Grand Triennial—
The vacant church triennial;

Or, if it please, and suits your air, It is the Candidating Fair."

"Oho! I hear; I have the word,
And will concede I had not heard
Of such convenience. But I see
What seems a strange economy
For such a use, at such expense—
Not very wise munificence."

"Most ecomomic, - pardon, sir; In this all judgments quite concur. No artist or mechanic show Could ever boast the vantage so For annual and full display, For all exchange and market-day. No party, ball, or merry-make Did ever serve so well for sake Of suiting, matching, marrying, As doth subserve this very thing. For since this new establishment. This grand triennial consent Of show and barter, I could tell Of many a suiting carried well, Of happy calls unanimous, With neither fore nor after fuss; Of many a sunny pastorate, And many a settlement of late Full three years running, good and straight."

At this my lesser wisdom bowed; And, musing to myself aloud If I were dupe or he were true, My friend, indignant, soon withdrew To some more credulous.

For then

The way was full; and they were men
Of such familiar cloth and mien
As those in schools of the prophets seen;
And prophecy of rain withal
They carried with a satchel small—
They carried with a 'beaver' tall.

The city had one thoroughfare, One crowded entrance-way; and there Great blazing signs all eyes engage:

- "Supply," "Exchange," "Wants," "Brokerage,"
- "First Office of Intelligence,

With Special Favors to Dispense";

- "Enquiries Confidential";
- "Old References Complete and Full";
- "Student Committee Quarters Here";
- "Trial Committee for One Year";
- "Here Consolation Furnished Free To Failing Suitors."

But to me,—
Quite scorning such official care,
Nor yet in need of such repair,—
More curious than aught before
Was that which hung on each church door.
For plain upon each door was hung,
With letters such as oft are flung
Unto the breeze political,
A sign, immense, reversible,
As one may read on office card,—
"Bank shut," "Bank open": so the board
Did make each door conspicuous
To frighten or invite.

For thus,
On one side, — which side most had need
Face outward, — I could, running, read:
"Church now in session. Please await
The trial of this Candidate."

But "Please await" did ill address
The temper of my purposes;
And ere I could reduce to sense
The pond'rous waves of eloquence

That roared and poured their pent-up rage,
As wild Numidian in cage

Will shake the tent and rend the air,
And hold in transcendental scare
A choir of babies, I had fled,
As drift upon the wave is sped
When bursts the dam; and many a rood
I drifted on increasing flood
From many a foaming orator,
By many a full placarded door,
On which I either read or guessed—

"In session."

But the crowd that pressed
Fast forward or retreating, each —
As surf ambitious climbs the beach,
And baffled, hastes again to hide
Its head in the pursuing tide —
Now thinner grew, and wasted more,
And wasted all, as just before,
One sign reversed I saw;—nor cared
What proud magnificence was reared
Above it; such was my intent

To gain precedence, and prevent Some call less manifest,—and read, With changing breath of hope and dread:

"Wanted:—A Pastor, young and smart,
Wise of head and strong of heart.
He must be staunchly orthodox,
Well reputed of all his flocks:
He must be grave and genial too,
Ready in word and ready to do.
He must be perfect—without a flaw
In pulpit power, and able to draw,
Able to hold and make secure
Our rank and our investiture.
Independent without offense;
Brave in the truth (at his own expense);
Largely furnished in every way,
Conservative, also up with the day.

He should be married "—What's that? whew!
"'He should be married' a year or two.
They should be mated, a model pair,
Wife sober, discret, and middling fair;
A pattern for all in her piety,
A model of all propriety,
A leader of best society,

At home an angel, abroad a saint,
Whose heart shall never tire nor faint
With half the burdens pastoral
And all the concerns of home as well.
These virtues, and such of a kindred kind
As will ready occur to a prudent mind—
If they shall appear, by the full consent
Of Church and Society; please present."

And I presented,—not until
One further reading of the Bill
And such momentous questionings
As well comport with sacred things.

"He should be married"; not. he must; And for the "should be" I could trust The weight of other qualities.

To compensate the lack in this.

Now deference would scarce relate
What honesty would have me state—
How on the footing of the Bill,
So moderate in claims and, still,
Some perilous, I did perceive,
And as I read did more believe

Proof full and final of a Call
So loud and clear that, over all
My modesty and self-distrust,
I yielded to an imperious must.
For — "Fifteen Thousand, More or Less,
For Salary" — I would confess
Was — was plain for any man to see.
Then said I: "Here am I, send me,
O Lord!" And me I sent.

Not quite

Within the inner door, in sight
Of all at entrance, one I took
For clerk of sessions, with a book
Full ample, stood and blocked the way
With such official look, dismay
Had turned me half, till I were sure
If that were not some fatal door,
And he a Cerberus to bay
In guard of some infernal way.
And deeper still I sank in dread
When 'bove the entrance I misread—
'No opening part nor closing prayer.'—
"All hope depart on entering here!"

I bowed, and he bow-wowed—"Your name, Credentials." Then my spirit came,
And from my portfeuillê I drew
A scrap-book, pasted through and through
With notices of calls, reports
Of sermons marvellous, all sorts
Of local paragraphs; in prints
Of widest circulation, hints
Most honorable,—of places where
I had performed the opening prayer,
With such a turn of compliment
That every flattered soul's consent
In heartiest 'amen' gave vent.

I passed; but as I passed there fell Upon my ear as 't were a knell— One whisper hoarse, and nothing more,— "Number one hundred and forty-four."

I had reread with a braver heart:
"Omit the opening and closing part";
But when to the waiting mass I turned
And blazed in the focus that on me burned,
I thought of the executioner

Who never refused the boon of prayer.

There were the deacons, all in a row, Set in a jury-box just below. Solemn and staid were their faces all, As if kept from a last year's funeral.

As well might one ten-pounder ball
Demolish a granite fortress wall
As I such adamantine stare
With siege of rhetoric.

And there,
One seat removed, the grand élite,
Most critical and most complete,
In nice discriminations learned,
To note how phrase and gesture turned,
Sat upright, and a little more,
And quite outlooked the rank before.

One other glance, and I had done,
For sympathy; but from that one,
So desperate, there came to me
Most serious catastrophe.
For, just to left—in front of course—
Of these hard-faced inquisitors,
An angel seemed to my relief—

Propitious fortune, but so brief! Those eyes were dark as liquid night; Those cheeks were fair as lilies white; Those lips could well outvoice the dove; That forehead! - 't was the throne of love; Those tresses!—Well, on either side, With look of undissembled pride, And cunning strategy of art, To make display, in better part, Of such rare treasure by contrast With relics of their beauty past, The ancient pair sat all intent, Till mother patience had been spent, And Mrs. McKey, with a wheezing twang That through the vast cathedral rang, Said "Mr. McKey, I told you so, He a'nt no married man; I know." But he, all innocent replied — "Nor he a'nt no man, I know."

I tried

To keep my head above the sea

That I half had prayed to swallow me;

And, if weather be fair when skies are red

And swallows twitter, I could have said "Fair day, indeed," as forth I drew That trial sermon.

Yes, as "new?"

To them as I could well affect
To venture on, with due respect
Unto myself. It was the same
Old stand-by that had earned a name
A humble man might well afford
To die on. All, with one accord,
Who ever dared to give such sign
Of friendship, had declared that mine,
Of all the sermons they had heard
Was, "whether in manner, thought, or word,
Most labored, most elaborate,
Abstruse, profound, and most ornate;"
And the Governor's great granddaughter-inlaw,

Who taught school, said "There wa'nt a flaw Or weakness in the whole discourse, Or doctrine she did not endorse."

'T was so familiar too, withal,
That I could nothing fear of fall

From any flight. And there were set—
So soon to prove a sore regret—
Impromptu passages, full wide,
Reserved in blank. But lest the tide
Of eloquence should break the banks,
And sport some free ecstatic pranks
Indecorous, there were prepared
Such words suggestive as I cared
For sure inflating, and to gauge
My small balloon with anchorage.

But oh the fates! or the decrees,—
Or name it whatsoe'er you please;—
For at the sound "All ready," spoke
By Cerberus the clerk, as stroke
Of bell at racing starts the steed,
As spear of Aeolus once freed
The winds, I read—not Malachi—
But "Chapter first—of Miss McKey!
And second verse!"

Deliver me!—
I could have fled a thousand miles
The scorehing of a thousand smiles

That might be heard. But I was off-Nor much it lacked that I was off; But, luckily, as rider clings, Like monkey to his steed of wings When at the start the girdle breaks, And, holding by the mane, he makes His circuit bareback; so I clung; And on my words all, breathless, hung; Or on my fate. — I could not tell; Good manners had revived so well. That all were breathless, sure I knew, From smiling. But more serious grew The court inquisitive, and all The company less critical, As on I sped, like railway train That sudden starts, while men in vain Rush for the rear in climbing race, To save a hold and riding-place, And dragging, fall, less worshipping Than cursing. Thus they tried to cling Unto my skirts, as forth I sprang Into the midst of such harangue As first drew on a wondrous stare,

And left them next in blank despair Of knowing what or where I was, In all the cloud of dust that rose 'Twixt them and me.

One leading thought
Unto full fourteen lines was wrought
In single sentence, so that all,
In one climactic rise and fall,
And single breath of rhetoric,
I could discharge so free and quick,
With such a mingled flash and roar,
That it had never failed before
Of gen'ral shock.

And this I fired;
Then made that pause—so much admired,
As mightier than the noise. But now
It was an 'awful pause'; for how
It may have given the weary rest
I know not; but remember best
Seven placid faces, all in a row,
Set in a jury-box just below.
Not a move of a lid, not a lip displaced,
Not a line of feeling or thought was traced;—

Seven busts, patient and motionless, Whose secrets no mortal would dare to guess.

There, too, was the rank of the grand clite,
Most critical and most complete,
True to their watch as a picket-guard,
Ready to challenge a frightened word;
And now that the words had ceased to flow,
They seemed to challenge the silence too.

But Mrs. McKey! Her eyes had grown, With her mouth, as wide as the gibbous moon;

And Mr. McKey had a face that might
Have passed for a pumpkin-moon-shine light.
And Miss McKey! — with her fan that played
On the flash of her eyes, like the leaves of
a shade

That sport a dance to the darting rays,

And twinkle the light that among them

plays;—

So flashed the light from the face so fair And I knew some ray of hope was there, If only the hearts of committee-men Were touched with the proof I witnessed then. So much I saw in that moment's time, As I drew my breath for a higher climb And a higher flight.

'T was a moment then Like that in the tide of battle, when The ranks reserved and the hope forlorn Unto the front, en masse, are borne, For the shout and charge to victory, (Or the fatal rout and sore dismay).

My hope forlorn was a passage where
My happiest thoughts for many a year
Had found a place—all jewels; yet,
In golden frame of logic set,
With figure, trope, and metaphor,
So thickly it could hold no more,—
So loud embellished, so ornate,
So brilliant and so delicate,
So classic, rich, and so profuse
Of colors gay and rare of use,—
So full of all things excellent
That youth and wisdom could invent,
That on this passage—I could stake
My fortune on it—I would make

Such stir tremendous that the shocks Should move those adamantine rocks That sat within the jury-box.

I went,

As rocket to the air is sent,
With trail of fire and flashing shot
And meteoric showers hot,
Till at the summit of ascent,
When all the blazing train is spent,
One grand explosion sounds, and quick
The would-be comet falls—a stick.

So I went up, and so came down.

For where those blanks, of such renown

For thoughts extempore, were set,

In highest flight I did forget

What next should come. 'And what a fall

Was there, my countrymen,' when all

My well-constructed phrase to serve

For splendid parabolic curve,

Broke at the middle, and midway

I tumbled!

Ask it not, I pray:
I did not look; I would not hear:

I only know that something queer
Ran over me, and then ran through
And back again, till all I knew
Was something sounding like encores,
And something seeming on all-fours,
Which was myself.

I rallied sore.

That time I made no pause; and more, I made no other pause, but read As when young urchin, whipped to bed, Says o'er his prayers defiant; thus I rattled on, like omnibus Affrighted on the homeward drive, Naught caring, but to come alive To safe retreat.

The tumult ceased—All save my own, which I increased, To win, at least, the full consent That all my thunder was not spent.

Then period after period rolled, Like sound-waves, when the bell is tolled — One alternating rise and fall Continuous, till on them all Some wondrous charm had seized.

I knew

The stillness that around me grew Was gathering proof of growing power, That yet might tell, ere that half hour Was sped, of fortunes well repaired.

And now, as the end drew on, I dared—With voice more hush, to hold the spell,
And save what I had earned so well—
To lift my eyes, and see the fall
Of that most finished stroke of all,
And finishing.....

'Now all the air
A solemn stillness held, save where
The beetle wheeled his droning flight,
And drowsy breathings lulled to quiet
The peaceful fold.'

One glance below:
There sat a grave, unconscious row
Of seven sleepers, and, behind,
Another row, as much resigned

As that before. And Mrs. McKey!—
Such silent speaking eestacy,
Such open countenance she bare,
That, but for truth, I would declare
'Twas nothing but a mouth, and round,
A bonnet for a border. Bound
In dreamland rapture, too, was he
Who shared that new-born prophecy
Of bliss domestic. But I saw,
What made my spirit freeze and thaw,
Between them, such a wicked light
From those two orbs of liquid night—
O wreck of fortune! Worst of all—
I broke, and lost my grand finale.

The rest—pray tell it—such a stir,
As when some loud, night-wand'ring cur
Barks at the sheepfold, and the flock
Spring up, as lifted by the shock
Of blast or battery; so did these
My hearers spring and snuff the breeze,
When I ceased barking.

"Please retire,"

Said Cerberus; "it will require
But briefest conference of the court
To make our judgment, and report
Your measure."

Willing I withdrew.

In that portentous waiting, new
And curious notices appeared,
And record-books, well thumbed and eared."

· "This notice to the candidate.

Our marking thus doth indicate

Your rank and promise. Number 'ten'

Means perfect; and the scale does then

Run downward unto number 'four.'

Of lesser rank we make no score."

"To Disappointed Candidate,
This notice" — most compassionate,
Most gracious hung — "Keep heart, good sir;
Our pledge of honor we confer
To hold in sympathizing care
Your rank and reputation fair
And privately."

But, for myself, Some doubtful proof stood on the shelf: "Dismissals," "Calls," "Retirements,"
"Clerk's Records Annual, Contents
For Office of Intelligence,"
"Trial Exchanges," "Index," whence
Name, place, age, circumstance, and worth,
Minute as farriers note the birth
And pedigree and blood and parts
Of horses for the sporting marts.

I saw; but, ere I could invest
A minute cheap in sinful quest
Of fellow-fates and fortunes, Clerk
Cerberus, yelping, with a jerk
Of would-be gracious utterance,
And smirk of suavity askance,
Tossed up my card, with: "There you have
Our judgment well pronounced."

I gave

A parting look, and nothing more, Upon the sign-board of the door, And read again the inviting part:

"Wanted: - a Pastor, young and smart";

Then to that card, on which I bare My fortune and my life's one care:

"Youngness, ten; smartness, four;
Average, seven: nothing more.
On this one virtue all agree,—
Incomprehensibility."

PART II.

"Yes; that's the word; I see; I see— Incomprehensibility."

"'Tis never too late to mend," said I '
'Tis never a failure that leaves a try;
'Tis never a loss that makes us wise,
And never a miss that wins the prize.
I'll take me down a grade, and then,
In simpler speech, I'm sure to win."

So from that central Gothic pile
I flung myself, in much the style
Of ostrich, climbing from the chase,
On wing and leg, at flying pace;
Lest in the wind some forward scent
Of reputation should prevent
And prejudice my coming where
More favored trial should repair
My ragged name and fortune.

Thus

I made my haste precipitous,
Till in the crowd again I wedged,
That all the sideway blocked and hedged
And, with much leisure to o'erhear,
I could narrate some strangely queer
And novel scenes.

Close on the walk,

A double row, in double talk
Contentious, did so mass in front
I thought it a church militant,
And turned, inquiring either way
For police to attend the fray.

Such loud protest and loud reply,
As geese at wat'ring-place will cry,
When hostile flocks dispute the right
With beak and wing, till, in the fight,
Each gander, mother, and baby goose
Doth set such earnest gabble loose
That nought is heard but babel-sound,
And nought but feathers strew the ground.

So strove with beak and wing the saints: Each unto each, in loud complaints, With zeal of anserine debate, Did argue for his candidate.

Ten men against ten men were set;
Ten women 'gainst ten women met;
Twice ten young boys and girls oppose,
On either side in party rows;
And ten times ten of every age,
Both saints and sinners, did engage
In circle round the war within,
To prove his candidate should win.

- "Your man's too young!" "And yours too old!"
- "Yours is too meek!" "And yours too bold!"
- "Yours is too green!" "And yours too dry!"
- "Yours cannot light!" "Nor yours fly!"
- "Yours too abstruse!" "And yours too plain!"
- "Yours too unpolished!" "Yours too vain!"
- "Yours is too short!" "And yours too tall!"
- "Yours is a boor!" "And yours a doll!"
- "Yours only reads!" "And yours rants!"
- "Yours deals in chips!" "And yours in cants!"
- "Your man's too dear!" "And yours too cheap!"
- "Yours cannot draw!" "Nor yours keep!"
- "Yours cannot sing!" "Nor yours pray"

"If y' have that man, I'll stay away!"
"If y' have your man, I'll never pay!"

'T was a galvanic-battery,
That one retort—"I'll never pay."
But more of this I could not hear;
For heart was tired, and time too dear
To enjoy fraternal bedlam.

On,

Through strife and din like Marathon, I passed, intent on sign-boards, till Again arrested by a bill Of wants more multiplied than those I first beheld. My eyes arose Once, twice, and higher, till they met The gable—'t was a sign-board yet! Then lat'rally another scan; Then 'long the side my vision ran Three hundred cubits. Then I knew What ark-itecture held my view; And what an enterprise was that That stole the pride of Ararat!

High-stationed on the outer stair,
Hard-by the door and sign-board there,—
Which one did separate suspend
Upon a swivel at the end,—
Sat one whose tribute I would give,
Had I but one last hour to live;
For in that genial, upturned face
I saw the first few lines of grace
And sympathy. A dog was he—
A genuine dog, with history—
Sad tell-tale photographing there
Of many a candidate's despair—
Writ over all his countenance.

He knew my errand at a glance,
And looked a hearty welcoming;
Then shook the most convenient thing
That he could shake; then looked demure,
In language I could read full sure:
"Such, such is friendship; all in vain!
In one half hour we part again."
Then, with a most expressive whine,
He drew my notice to the sign,—
So well had long experience made

The very brute to serve his trade Most gallantly.

Without a word, We read the advertising board —

The dog and I.

There was a full

Fac simile and literal
Repeating of the fourteen lines
Which foremost stood on all the signs.

"Wanted:—A Pastor, young and smart, Wise of head and strong of heart. He must be staunchly orthodox, Well reputed of all his flocks: He must be grave and genial too, Ready in word and ready to do. He must be perfect—without a flaw In pulpit power, and able to draw, Able to hold and make secure Our rank and our investiture. Independent without offense; Brave in the truth (at his own expense); Largely furnished in every way, Conservative, also up with the day. Then, with a turn original,

This variation practical Did bring relief.

"We shall require—
What all true pastors will desire—
The complement of services
Which venerable custom gives,—
Two sermons written, first of all,
With sixty minutes' interval,
In which the pastor shall address
The Sabbath-school and Bible-class.
(Until the choir shall be agreed,
The preacher will have frequent need
To lead the singing.) Then a third
And evening sermon will be heard,
Which, for relief and varied style,
Were best extempore, to beguile
Our weariness.

For sake of rest
To pastor, Monday will be best
For entertaining visitors.
On Tuesday he will out of doors,
And do his calls so diligent
That none be left to make complaint.
On Wednesday night, the sociable

Will of his tact at pleasing all
Give fullest proof. On Thursday night,
Prayer-meeting, and no fires to light.
Friday and Saturday 'twere wise
To give to study, and sermonize.

If he shouldn't be married, it's just as well; And we'd like to board him round a spell."

This final clause, as did behoove,
Staid me a moment, when a move
Impatient of the faithful hound
Showed him fast reading, further down,
Where his official paw did rest
On that one place he knew the best,
Which thus did run: "Five hundred cash!
And various donations!"

"Trash!"

I said, and passed the outer door, Which was the inner also.

Four

And twenty heads appeared in all, And scattered to the further wall, With equal space of interval, Both up and down and lateral. "Simplicity — simplicity.
"T was there I failed," I said to me,
As one, the foremost head, arose,
And motioned upwards, I suppose
Some fifteen cubits.

Up the flight,
Or ladder-way, I climbed a height
That, looking downward, I had said,
Was sure a view from some mast-head
To vessel deck. I peeped about,
Like a lone barn-swallow, peering out
From rafter-nest, when, on the floor
Or cross-beam stationed, twenty-four
Most gracious cats delay a nap
To feast their maws on some mishap.

"Please lead with a familiar hymn," A billet said. I sang with a vim:

"Mid scenes of confusion and creature complaints,

How dreary the cold criticism of saints.

The few lurid moments that darken us here

Are enough of life's woes; full enough of its

cheer."

"And now for the sermon that should secure That commendation I lost before."

I drew the plainest of all my stock — Food laid so low that the least of the flock Could reach it easy; and then, I knew The taller sheep would admire it too.

Now, whether it was my wondrous power, Or the hearers had taken their sleep before With other candidate, 'twas clear, That time, I surely had their ear; And, what was more, I had their eyes, Which poured a flattering surprise On me, as I did pour such plain, Fresh-water speech, like summer rain; While they their thirsty chalices Held up in wond'ring gratefulness And suppliant rapture. Not a stir Impatient; not one least demur Of judgment; but each captive look Did hold an offering which I took For such full-tide assurance, then, Of victory, that I know not when

Did champion of Olympic game, Did orator of any name,— Of pulpit, rostrum, court, or bar, Bear his vainglorious hope so far As mine was borne.

Ere I could reach
The pulpit-landing, they had each—
Those four and twenty lovers made—
Formed in a line of close parade.
Then forward all in order pressed,
And each my flaming hope addressed.

The 'elder,' first, a long-retired Sage potentate, was thus inspired: "Young-man,-I-would-congratulate Your-first-endeavor. You-will-rate, When-years-have-added-depth-to-grace, No-mean-incumbent-of-your-place."

Next 'deacon,' senior, thus to me:
"I like your young simplicity."
Next 'deacon,' junior: "I admire
The promise of your youthful fire."
Then mothers, wives, and misses bow:

"Our compliments you'll please allow."

Then boys and girls brought up the rear,
And each did scratch my itching ear
So gen'rously. Just twenty-four
Lean compliments; and nothing more.

A moment, on the outer stair,
I gave to honest friendship there,
With this adieu: "My canine friend,
Be faithful: soon your task will end.
And when this dying church is dead,
Set up that sign-board at the head,
To mark its tomb, and history,
And fatal cause. Then come to me,
And, for your kindness, I engage
Your end shall be in good old age."
He gave his paw, and I my hand;
The pledge he seemed to understand.
And turned the board: while I wrote down:
"One soul humane in all the town."

Some spirits seemed to rule the place; For there was painful stint of grace In all the weather of my mood.

And thoughts unholy, in a brood

Of muffled curses, that seemed bent

To pass my clenched teeth, and vent

Short prayers in hottest scripture phrase

Of Sodom and Gomorrah's blaze,

I did suppress; but not my pace;

For I had mind to flee that place,

Without a backward look, or halt,

As I had feared the pillar of salt.

But, near the outward-going gate,
I was arrested; for my rate
Of movement did betoken much
Of business errand; and 'twas such
He thought it, whose exclaim broke higher
Than pulpit rant, or party crier:

"This way, sir! This way you will find Signs ready-made to meet your mind, Or made to order."

"Sign? A sign?"
(I doubt if all were quite divine
That moved me then). "I will," said I,

"One mammoth sign-board, broad and high, If such you have — The Pastor's Call."

"Your order, then, sir; for, of all Demands yet made upon my store, Such sign was never sought before."

"To order, then; and paint it thus; And hang it most conspicuous.

"Wanted a Church,—in a beautiful place;
Full of delights, and abounding in grace;
Full of benevolence, generous, kind;
Lofty of purpose, and all of a mind;
Ready in sympathy; ready to take
Liberal share of the burdens they make;
Ready to render a large repay
For all the favors that drift that way.

"They should never be petulant,
Spurning the gifts that the Lord has sent.
They should be competent, every one,
To examine the preacher all alone;
To give their opinion critical,
With nothing of notions trivial,
And nothing of need to think or guess
What estimate the world may pass.
And when their pastor has served them well,

And the devil desires to change, a spell,
And shows them how, with the bait of gold,
They may lure the pride of another fold;
And the pastor shifts and shifts about,
And a man comes in, and a man goes out,
And a courting, flirting, jilting game
Is bringing the Lord's dear cause to shame,
Then they should pray, and the prayer repeat:
Save us, O Lord, from our vain conceit."

PART III.

Every spire was hidden, quite,
Under the raven wings of night;
The bells had lost their clanging tone,
And nought pursued but a feeble moan,—
A fit refrain for a weary heart,
As I fled a league from that pulpit mart,
And cared not whither or where I came,
If I could only forget my name,
And never could see, wherever I went,
A vacant church or a vacant saint.

The softened gleam of a village light Over the hill came beaming bright — Beaming bright as a silver thread; And it seemed as if an angel sped Over the thread, — over the way, — Over the course of the silver ray, —

And beckoned me on, as he went before, Till I stood by a humble chapel-door.

Music soft as heaven's bells,
Into my sad spirit pouring,
All my heavy care dispels.
Oil of gladness! saints adoring—
Holy notes, according voices
Bless my ear; my heaven rejoices.

I could have stolen a listening there,
Tiring never of song or prayer;
Only the prayer had a burden, then,
That had stolen my heart, and lured me in.

"Send us, dear Lord, in thy favoring hour, One who shall come in the Spirit's own power. Send whom thou wilt, with a shepherd's heart; Seal him to us, that he may not depart.

Make thou the marriage of holiest bans;
Thine be the fruit and the glory, not man's.
Guide us, great Shepherd, nor leave us alone;
Thy will, not our will, forever be done."

"Thy will, not my will," my soul did respond: "Here am I; send me; and seal thou the bond."

Whether awake, or whether I dreamed; Whether 'twas real, or only seemed; Whether the place was earth or heaven, I remember the joy of the welcome given.







